Department of Human Services

Articles in Today's Clips

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

Prepared by the DHS Office of Communications (517) 373-7394



TOPIC	<u>PAGE</u>
*Child Abuse/Neglect/Protection	2-12
Foster Care	13-15
Health Care	16-17
Child Custody	18-19
Fraud	20
Fatherhood	21

^{*}Important story at this spot



Foster mom guilty in death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge

June 18, 2007

By JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

UPDATED AT 4:04 P.M.

A Wayne County Circuit Court jury found Charlsie Adams-Rogers guilty today of involuntary manslaughter and felony child abuse in the death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge, a foster child who was in her care.

Adams-Rogers, 60, was found not guilty of a misdemeanor child abuse charge involving Isaac's 4-year-old sister.

She faces up to 15 years in prison on the manslaughter charge when she is sentenced July 2. She could receive up to four years in prison on the child abuse charge. She was remanded to Wayne County Jail without bond.

Isaac and his 4-year-old sister entered Michigan's foster care system in September 2005 after being found by Westland police in a dangerously filthy home rented by their parents, Matt and Jennifer Lethbridge. The Lethbridges had previously lost permanent custody of seven other foster children in Washtenaw County due to environmental and medical neglect.

But because Isaac and his sister were in Wayne County, they were placed in foster care through the Wayne County Department of Human Services, which mostly contracts with private, nonprofit foster care agencies to provide supervision for thousands of children removed from their parents' care because of abuse or neglect.

Foster children entering care in Wayne County are assigned to the private agencies on a rotating basis. On the day Isaac and his sister needed foster care, it was the Lula Belle Stewart Center's turn to accept children.

An investigation by the Free Press that began after Isaac was found beaten to death in Adams-Rogers' northwest Detroit home on Aug. 16, 2006, showed that the Lula Belle agency had placed him and his sister in three troubled foster homes in 11 months. None of the foster homes appeared to be suitable, according to records obtained by the Free Press.

After their first foster mother closed her home to move out of state, Isaac and his sister were sent to the licensed foster home of Patricia Kennedy in Detroit, where other young children or teenagers often supervised them. While at the home, Isaac's sister tested positive for hepatitis B, a disease commonly spread through sexual contact or intravenous drug abuse.

On June 29, 2006, Isaac and his sister were removed from Kennedy's foster home based on the suspicion that someone there had sexually abused the girl. That same day, Lula Belle foster care worker Karl Troy took the children to Adams-Rogers' home on Greenlawn in northwest Detroit. According to testimony, Troy handed over the Lethbridge children to Adams-Rogers in the driveway of her home and did not go inside to see the condition of the home or how many people were living there.

Troy testified that he was told by licensing workers at Lula Belle to place the children with Adams-Rogers because there were available beds. But the Free Press found there already were several people living in Adams-Rogers' 3-bedroom home, including two teenaged foster girls, a 1-year-old girl she was adopting and 18-year-old and 12-year-old girls that she already had adopted.

The 12-year-old, now 13, is an emotionally disturbed child whom Adams-Rogers herself had reported as violent and acting out sexually. In intake papers for a 2003 psychiatric hospitalization for the girl, Adams-Rogers said the girl had spoken of injuring or killing other children. The girl, who has not been charged with any crime, is suspected of causing Isaac's fatal injuries. She told investigators that she was playing with Isaac, tossing him on a mattress, when he missed and landed on the floor.

According to his autopsy, Isaac had brain hemorrhaging, a broken right collarbone and many bruises and abrasions. Medical experts testified during the trial that the second-degree burns on Isaac's torso could have come from a hot iron and the internal bleeding was likely caused by being struck by a fist, kicked or hit with an object. He was 3 feet tall and weighed 21 pounds.

Friends, relatives and other foster children testified that Adams-Rogers gave the responsibility of caring for Isaac and his sister to the 13-year-old who, witnesses said, had forced the children to sit on a toilet seat after they soiled themselves and hit them with her hands, a belt and a television remote control. After Isaac's killing, Adams-Rogers lost her parental rights to that girl and the 1-year-old.

Isaac's parents had complained that Troy did not monitor their children well in the three foster homes and that they frequently had trouble getting him to return their phone calls.

Troy, who no longer works at Lula Belle, testified under a grant of immunity, meaning the prosecutor's office has promised he will not be prosecuted for failing to report suspected child abuse to Child Protective Services, a 93-day misdemeanor.

Nearly two weeks before Isaac's death, Troy said he saw bruises on the boy, but that he believed Adams-Rogers when she said a doctor had determined that the bruises were not caused by abuse. Troy admitted he did not call the doctor to verify Adams-Rogers' story.

Adams-Rogers' attorney, Warren Harris, said during his closing comments that Troy and the doctors who examined Isaac had slanted their testimony against Adams-Rogers because they may be culpable in a civil lawsuit filed by the Lethbridges.

But Harris spoke more about himself than Adams-Rogers in his closing statements, even telling a joke about lawyers, remarking that he didn't know his son was violent as a child until he happened to see a fight one day and saying that as a grandfather he carefully watched his 4-year-old granddaughter while she played in a swimming pool because he had a legal and moral duty to do so.

Harris said his client did not know that the girl, who was 12 when Isaac died, was violent and aggressive, despite documents that showed Adams-Rogers had gotten mental health treatment for the girl several times since 2003.

"What she had in her home for nine years was what she believed was just a big happy family," Harris said of Adams-Rogers' foster home where relatives and friends came and went at all hours of the day.

"Isaac lost his life and it was terrible," Harris said.

Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey laid responsibility squarely at the feet of Adams-Rogers, saying of Isaac: "The last days of his life were a living hell and that is directly her responsibility."

Contact JACK KRESNAK at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

"Isaac lost his life, and it was terrible," Harris said.

Adams-Rogers, 60, is charged with involuntary manslaughter, a 15-year felony; second-degree child abuse, a 4-year felony, and fourth-degree child abuse, a 1-year misdemeanor. Her foster home was licensed through the Lula Belle Stewart Center of Detroit.

The trial began with jury section June 4.

Judge Vera Massey Jones adjourned for a short lunch at 11:55 a.m. and ordered the jury to return for instructions on the law at 12:30 p.m.

After jury instructions, two of the 14 jurors will be chosen by lot and excused from deciding the case. The remaining 12 jurors must reach a unanimous verdict.

Contact JACK KRESNAK at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Copyright © 2007 Detroit Free Press Inc.



Foster mother guilty in Isaac's death

Adams-Rogers jailed before sentencing

June 19, 2007

BY JACK KRESNAK

FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Saying she questioned the character of a former Detroit foster mother and her family, a Wayne County judge jailed the woman moments after a jury convicted her Monday of involuntary manslaughter and child abuse in the death of a 2-year-old boy in her home in August.

The jury of nine women and three men took a little more than two hours to convict Charlsie Adams-Rogers, 60, on charges related to the Aug. 16 beating death of Isaac Lethbridge, who had been placed in Rogers' foster home six weeks earlier. Adams-Rogers, also known as Paris Rogers, was acquitted of a misdemeanor child abuse charge involving Isaac's 4-year-old sister.

In sending Adams-Rogers to jail pending sentencing July 2, Judge Vera Massey Jones said the woman and her family showed they could not be trusted and that she might not return to court to be sentenced.

Last week, Jones barred Adams-Rogers' family from the courthouse after complaints from the jury two days in a row that her family members were intimidating them.

Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Lisa Lindsey said Adams-Rogers' family has obstructed the search for truth in Isaac's killing. Because Adams-Rogers is not believed to have inflicted any of Isaac's injuries, Lindsey said, charges may be brought against others in Adams-Rogers' home that day, including a now 13-year-old emotionally disturbed girl suspected of abusing Isaac and his sister.

"There's a lot we still don't know about exactly what happened in the house," Lindsey said after the verdicts were reached about 3:36 p.m. "Who else was culpable, we're still looking into. But, obviously, we don't have the cooperation of the people who were there."

Lindsey said she and Detroit police Sgt. Constance Slappey had spoken to neighbors who were afraid to testify about what was going on in Adams-Rogers' home. According to testimony, after a neighbor called Child Protective Services about how the foster children were being treated, Adams-Rogers wrote a letter to neighbors telling them to mind their own business and had her adopted daughter deliver it.

"Now that the conviction has been had, perhaps those people would feel more comfortable about giving more information about exactly what they know," Lindsey said. She urged witnesses to call Slappey at 313-596-2266 anytime.

Adams-Rogers could be sentenced to up to 15 years in prison on the involuntary manslaughter charge and up to four years on the second-degree child abuse charge.

A Free Press examination of the case after Isaac's death showed that the Lula Belle Stewart Center of Detroit had placed him and his sister in three troubled foster homes in 11 months.

None of the homes appeared to be suitable, according to records obtained by the Free Press. There also were irregularities in how Adams-Rogers was assessed for her foster care license and a string of nine complaints about her that failed to raise alarms.

Isaac's father, Matthew Lethbridge of Canton, said he was happy with the verdicts.

"I hope they don't stop here. There are many people who are responsible, who could have protected Isaac from the fate that he received," he said.

http://www.freep.com/apps/pbcs.dll/artikkel?Avis=C4&Dato=20070619&Kategori=NEWS02&Lopenr=7... 6/19/2007

Adams-Rogers, whose testimony last week was seen by several observers as disingenuous, showed no emotion as the verdicts were read. After the judge sent her to jail, she calmly handed her purse to a woman who had been with her and was led away by sheriff's deputies.

Her attorney, Warren Harris, had no comment about the verdicts but said his client "handled it very well, I think."

"Naturally," Harris said, "she doesn't feel good. It hurts."

A family member said Adams-Rogers is likely to appeal her convictions.

In a written statement, family members said a key witness lied, the judge was biased, and the verdict by a jury with only two African-American jurors was unjust.

Isaac and his sister entered Michigan's foster care system in September 2005 after being found by Westland police in a filthy home rented by their parents, Matthew and Jennifer Lethbridge. The Lethbridges had previously lost permanent custody of six other kids in Washtenaw County because of environmental and medical neglect.

On June 29, 2006, Isaac and his sister were removed from one foster home because the sister may have been sexually abused and their Lula Belle foster care worker, Karl Troy, placed them in Adams-Rogers' home on Greenlawn in northwest Detroit.

The Lula Belle agency apparently did not consider the risk of placing such young children in a crowded home with an emotionally disturbed girl who needed medications to control her behavior.

According to his autopsy, Isaac had brain hemorrhaging, a broken right collarbone, many bruises and abrasions and second-degree burns on his torso.

"The last days of his life were a living hell," assistant prosecutor Lindsey told the jury. Then, motioning to Adams-Rogers, Lindsey said, "and that is directly her responsibility."

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or <u>jkresnak@freepress.com</u>. Staff writer Ruby L. Bailey contributed to this report.

Copyright © 2007 Detroit Free Press Inc.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News** To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

June 19, 2007

Foster mom convicted in death

Prosecutors: Woman failed to protect Isaac from abuse

Karen Bouffard / The Detroit News

DETROIT -- A longtime foster mother was convicted of involuntary manslaughter Monday in the abuse death of 2-year-old Isaac Lethbridge, boosting hopes of investigators that reluctant witnesses will come forward and help catch his killer.

Wayne County jurors needed less than three hours to conclude Charlsie Adams-Rogers, 60, of Detroit failed to protect Isaac from multiple blunt force traumas and iron burns that killed him Aug. 16.

She was convicted of involuntary manslaughter, a 15-year felony, and second-degree child abuse, but jurors acquitted her of fourth-degree child abuse involving Isaac's sister, now 5.

Adams-Rogers showed no emotion when the verdicts were read. Her defense blamed the torture on her adopted daughter, now 13, but investigators say a small number of people know the truth, and they aren't talking.

"Everybody in the house knows what happened, and they don't want to say (who did it)," said Lisa Lindsey, an assistant prosecutor.

"The fear in that neighborhood of Mrs. Rogers and her family is tremendous. There are neighbors who indicated they were afraid to come in."

The adopted daughter has a history of psychiatric problems, and Adams-Rogers claimed the girl threw Isaac on a mattress repeatedly the day he died. Suspicions also were raised at the trial about her son, Anthony Rogers, 42, who had a burn on his hand shortly before Isaac was found unconscious, but left before police arrived.

He said he was injured at work that day.

Isaac's birth parents, Matthew and Jennifer Lethbridge, embraced and cried after the verdict. They have lost 10 of their children to the state child protection services, which has been criticized because of the treatment of their son.

Matthew Lethbridge said he hopes others also will be held accountable for Isaac's death.

"There are many people that could have protected Isaac," Matthew Lethbridge added. "There were failures across the board that caused my son to die."

Sentencing is July 2 for Adams-Rogers, who has maintained her innocence. During closing arguments, her attorney, Warren Harris, portrayed the nine-year foster mother as the selfless matriarch of a "big, happy family" who took in children others didn't.

"I'd be willing to bet if you tried to tell Mrs. Rogers that the child she knew since she was 5 years old that she adopted was capable of doing anything like this," Harris said, referring to the adopted daughter, "if you can't see it how can you intend it?"

Dana Rogers, the defendant's daughter, said her mother was "proven guilty without being presumed innocent."

"It was nothing but lies being told," said Rogers, 35. "There was nothing about the real Charlsie Rogers."

The verdict came swiftly after the jury of three men and nine women reheard testimony from a neighbor who said she heard a child's cries for about two hours the day Isaac died. Drunella Jackson said she heard a female voice say, "shut that damn kid up."

The verdict followed an often contentious trial. Emotions peaked last week when Circuit Judge Vera Massey Jones banned Adams-Rogers' family from the court until the end of the hearing.

Jurors, who complained of intimidation from her supporters, received security escorts from the courthouse Monday.

The conviction is the coda to a tragedy that began six weeks before his death, when Isaac was transferred from another foster home because he was abused, Lindsey said. During his final, painful hours, Adams-Rogers never checked on the boy or walked upstairs to hear why he was crying, the prosecutor said.

"Isaac came to her, and she was supposed to be his guardian angel," Lindsey said. "But instead, the last days of his life were a living hell."

You can reach Karen Bouffard at (734) 462-2206 or kbouffard@detnews.com.

Return to regular web page



06/18/2007

Child Death Review Team receives state honors



During a recent state-wide Child Death Review (CDR) Training, the Van Buren County CDR Team was presented with an award from the Michigan Child Death Review Program and the Michigan Department of Human Services commending the county's Child Death Review Team "for your commitment to saving the lives of children in Michigan. Your contribution of prevention initiatives is valued and appreciated." It marked the first time this award had been presented to a county Child Death Review Team. Members of the county's Child Death Review Team include, in back row, from left, Dr. Rex Cabaltica, Mike Spring, Daryl Bean, Paula Doan, Sandy Nicholas and Lindsay Gross; in front row, from left, Freda Osborne, Tiara McKay, Emily Diedrich and Deb Salvano.

Hartford - During a recent state-wide Child Death Review (CDR) Training, the Van Buren County CDR Team was presented with an award from the Michigan Child Death Review Program and the Michigan Department of Human Services commending the county's Child Death Review Team "for your commitment to saving the lives of children in Michigan. Your contribution of prevention initiatives is valued and appreciated."

It marked the first time this award had been presented to a county Child Death Review Team.

The Van Buren County CDRT core membership includes individuals from the following disciplines: Van Buren/Cass County District Health Department, Van Buren County Department of Human Services (including Child Protective Services), Michigan State Police, Van Buren County Sheriff's Office, Van Buren County Community Mental Health, Medical Examiner's Office, and South Haven Community Hospital.

In Van Buren County, the deaths of children ages 0-18 years (sometimes including 19 year olds) are reviewed. In order to decrease the number of child deaths, it must first be understood how and why the child died through a comprehensive review process done by an interdisciplinary group of people at the county level.

These findings are then used to take action to prevent other deaths and improve the health and safety of our children.

The factors that lead to a child's death are identified and a determination is made of whether or not the death was preventable.

From this review process, communities can be motivated to take action to eliminate these factors that contributed to the death of the child; and improve response to child deaths, including investigations

and provision of services to those affected by the death.

The Michigan Child Death State Advisory Team studies county review team findings to identify and make recommendations on policy and statutory changes that relate to child fatalities and to guide statewide prevention, education, and training efforts.

Recently, the Van Buren County Child Death Review Team (CDRT) was asked to speak on the Power of the Process at a state-wide annual Child Death Review Training held May 6-8.

The team's co-chair, Paula Doan, Michigan State Police, trooper, spoke at the training on behalf of the team.

Examples of the Power of the Process for Van Buren County CDRT have included improved use of child death protocols by law enforcement at the child death scene, recommendation of further investigation, Child Protective Services (CPS) involvement when other children were in the home, changes in cause of death, and many different prevention activities.

Prevention activities have included various conferences for the general public and/or professionals from different agencies, bulletin boards and displays, newspaper articles, and collaborative activities and events with the Van Buren Safe Kids Chapter.

At these events the team members have provided written educational materials, displays, and give-aways which have focused on the prevention of deaths that have been reviewed by the team over the last four to five years.

Several members on the CDRT also sit on the Safe Kids Chapter and actively participate in events for both.

The death of any child is a tragic loss, which has great impact on the child's family and the larger community. The Van Buren Child Death Review Team is dedicated to educating the public on child safety issues and working to prevent unintentional injuries.

For more information visit www.keepingkidsalive.org.

©Courier Leader 2007

Letters

Bay City Times

June 19, 2007

Child advocates

Voice: Laurisa Cummings, Bay City

Bill No. 141 has been introducted into the Michigan Legislature by Sens. VanWoerkom, Birkholz and Jansen. This bill has been introduced to establish and regulate CASA programs, that of "Court Appointed Special Advocates."

These advocates are volunteers within a community who evaluate, monitor, and advocate for the best interests of children who are involved in the circuit court when abuse or neglect has been reported and/or substantiated. The National CASA organization is supported through various organizations including Coca-Cola, NBC Productions, the United States Department of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Studies, including one done by the Office of the Inspector General, suggest the CASA programs are very successful and assist in providing positive outcomes for the children they serve. Currently, there are 19 counties in the state of Michigan that have CASA programs. Saginaw County has its own CASA program, but Bay County does not.

I question then, is there an overlooked need in Bay County? Could the children in Bay County who have been involved in child abuse and neglect cases benefit from a CASA program? Given the costs of child abuse, a staggering \$94 billion a year nationwide, I question if Bay County is looking at all ways in which to reduce costs.

With a review of the Friend of the Court currently in process, I challenge Judge Schmidt to review the statistics of Bay County, review the supportive statistics of the National CASA program and evaluate the need to implement a CASA program. I also encourage our local senators and state representatives to support Bill No. 141.





Abused children have a Safe Harbor

Tuesday, June 18, 202007

Abused and neglected children in Allegan County can find valuable resources at the Safe Harbor Children's Advocacy Center.

The nonprofit agency, at 402 Trowbridge St. in Allegan, provides a variety of services to assist victims of child abuse and neglect, from birth to age 17.

Safe Harbor also educates the public about the damaging effects of child abuse and neglect through media campaigns using highway billboards, news releases, radio spots, and the distribution of posters and brochures.

One of the organization's goals is to help break the cycle of abuse with campaigns that focus on specific child abuse issues, and by providing helpful tips for parents.

Safe Harbor facilitates a variety of educational programs on topics including "I Will Keep My Body Safe," "Child Abuse Awareness," "Internet Safety," and "Dating Violence."

The programs are available for presentation to schools, hospitals, and other agencies.

The Children's Advocacy Center at Safe Harbor is a centralized, child-friendly facility where children come to disclose allegations of abuse. The center is nationally accredited and provides an array of services aimed at enhancing the Allegan County communities' response to incidences of child abuse and neglect.

Services include on-site forensic interviews, counseling services for victims of sexual abuse and severe physical abuse or domestic violence, on-site medical services, victim advocacy, and the coordination of the Allegan County Child Abuse Investigation Team.

At the center, children participate in a coordinated child abuse investigation. Professionals from law enforcement, Child Protective Services, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, medical and mental health fields, Safe Harbor, and the community all work as a team to help victims

Safe Harbor is also the home base for the Court Appointed Special Advocacy Program (CASA).

CASA provides volunteer, community-driven advocacy for abused and neglected children as they move through the court system. CASA trains volunteers to serve as court-appointed advocates, to represent the best interested of the abused or neglected children.

During what may be the most traumatic experience of a child's life, CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy. Volunteers are assigned to one case and one child at a time, and take time to learn about the child's history, lifestyle and needs.

The volunteers present judges with relevant information about the child's circumstances.

For more information about Safe Harbor and CASA, visit www.safeharborallegan.org, or call (269) 673-3791.

©2007 Advance Newspapers

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.

Print Article | Close Window

Legislators attend 'Kids in Crime' event

Program of prevention

By JANE NORDBERG, DMG Writer

HANCOCK — Michigan legislators need to invest more funding in the state's most valuable resource - its children.

That was the message sent Saturday during a "Fight Crime: Invest in Kids Michigan" roundtable discussion at the Ramada Inn in Hancock.

Billed as a "Community Conversation," the discussion was well-attended by local members of the court system, child and youth welfare advocates, educators, law enforcement and State Sen. Mike Prusi, D-Ishpeming and State Rep. Mike Lahti, D-Hancock.

K.P. Pelleran, state director of Lansing-based Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, told the group they were the experts in the field, and legislators need to hear their views.

"We rely on you to tell the people in Lansing what will happen if programs that aid children aren't funded, and time is of the essence," Pelleran said.

Pelleran's group had the support of Houghton County Sheriff Brian McLean, who opened the conversation with some sobering statistics — the state annually investigates more than 28,000 cases of child abuse and neglect. Those children, in turn, are 13 percent more likely to neglect or abuse their own children, he said.

"Having to place children in foster care is breaking the back of the county budget," he said. "If we could focus more on preventing that, it would save time, money and heartbreak for everyone involved."

McLean said there were more 17-year-olds in the county's 28-bed jail and 26-bed work camp than ever before.

"It's alarming to see that number rise each year," he said. "To see the train wreck of these kids' lives is terrible."

Incarceration costs are annually \$45,000 for an adult and range from \$85,000 to \$125,000 per year for juveniles, Pelleran added.

Copper Country Intermediate School District Special Education Learning Center Supervisor Emilie Krznarich said that while programs such as Early On have some proven success, there are gaps in funding that need to be bridged.

Early On, she said, covers kids birth to 3 with pre-existing or chronic medical conditions or developmental delays. After age 3 and prior to entering preschool, however, there is no funding for the child that shows moderate developmental delays but is not severely cognitively impaired.

"Unless they qualify for special education, they're out in the cold," she said. Also, many parents will not seek help for their at-risk children even if they do qualify.

"We need to normalize the idea for parents that they don't have to do it alone," she said. "Programs like Head Start should be run more like a universal preschool. It would be something all kids would do and there wouldn't be a stigma attached."

Rod Liimatainen of the B-H-K Child Development Board said funding needs to be increased for the Michigan School Readiness Program, a support program for 4-year-olds to help them prepare for kindergarten. His agency receives \$3,300 per child annually for the MSRP, a figure that hasn't increased in nine years.

"To me, it's really a shame that the state has not at least kept up with inflation," Liimatainen said.

Copper Country Intermediate School District Superintendent Dennis Harbour said he sees the problem with at-risk kids only getting worse if more funding isn't allocated to help them prepare for their educational years.

"Many of these kids are just not going to be able to meet the new high school graduation requirements if they don't get this help early on," he said.

McLean said he realized that for many people in the room Saturday, the information was not a revelation. "I know we're preaching to the choir here," he said. "Everybody here is well aware of the importance of funding these programs. The overall message is to put the money up front into kids so we don't end up paying for it later in the penal system."

Both legislators said they were aware of the importance of the funding, but that they couldn't go it alone.

"You don't have to convince Mike and I, but society as a whole needs to know we're moving in the right direction," Lahti said.

"The studies and data are here," Prusi said. "If we would invest these dollars up front, we wouldn't have had to build 30 prisons in the last 25 years in the state of Michigan."

However, any legislator proposing tax increases in the face of the state's budget crisis will take considerable criticism, he said.

"It will be 'those damn Democrats are in our wallets again'," Prusi said.

"We have to get it out that yes, balancing the state budget is critical but these services are equally critical to a safe and productive community."

Jane Nordberg can be reached at jnordberg@mininggazette.com





Southwest Michigan Bands battle child abuse

Tuesday, June 18, 202007

Bands throughout Southwest Michigan are competing to raise money to fight child abuse in Allegan County.

A battle of the bands competition that began in May is benefiting the Safe Harbor Children's Advocacy Center in Allegan. Safe Harbor is a nonprofit agency, helping child abuse victims through prevention education, intervention, treatment, and advocacy.

Throughout May, 17 bands performed at the Ground Sphere Rhythm Caf)n Allegan to battle for top honors. The contest was sponsored by the Guitar Center in Kalamazoo, GetMadBaby.com, and Ground Sphere Rhythm CafŠ

As the bands competed, the field was narrowed to eight semi-final contenders. The top two bands each night, based on advance ticket sales and audience vote, proceeded to the semi-final rounds.

The June 9 round featured U.C. Losers, of Caledonia; Skankhouse Gentlemen, of Plainwell; The Envy League, of Grand Rapids; and Ginormous and the Wee Ones, of Kalamazoo.

The Saturday, June 23 round will feature The Common Good, with members from Allegan, Plainwell, and Jackson; Fishlips, of Kalamazoo; Axis, also of Kalamazoo, and Chupakabra, of Big Rapids.

The top two bands from each of these rounds will proceed to the final round, at 8 p.m. on July 7 at Ground Sphere Rhythm Caf 1608 Lincoln Road (M-89).

Doors open at 7 p.m. and tickets will be available at the door. For a full schedule, visit www.myspace.com/safeharborbotb.

©2007 Advance Newspapers

© 2007 Michigan Live. All Rights Reserved.



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News** To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

June 19, 2007

Van Buren Township

Two taken from foster home

Kids' removal is part of probe into residence where 3-year-old died from head injuries; no charges filed.

Kim Kozlowski / The Detroit News

VAN BUREN TOWNSHIP -- State officials on Monday removed two children from the foster home where a 3-year-old boy died in April. James Earl Bradley Jr. died April 15 at Mott Children's Hospital in Ann Arbor of head injuries sustained five days earlier in the Van Buren Township foster home run by Christina Woodward and Lasan Karva, according to an autopsy report.

James is the third child to have died in a Michigan foster home in the past eight months.

Washtenaw County Medical Examiner Bader Cassin wrote in his autopsy report that James had a fracture on the left side of his head, as well as severe brain swelling and hemorrhaging behind the eyes.

He also had abrasions on both sides of his torso that appeared to be fingernail marks, and a bony outgrowth in the center of his right thigh bone characteristic of a healed injury, according to the report.

No one has been charged in the case, according to Van Buren Township Police Det. Bob Green, who attempted to interview Woodward and Karva, the married couple who became James' foster parents in November 2006.

He was their first foster child; they were his second set of foster parents.

Green interviewed Woodward, but the couple's attorney, Ronald Gold, then advised them not to speak to police.

"Everybody is saying they don't know what happened," Green said.

Gold countered that police completed the investigation, and the state's removal of the children was aimed at pressuring the family. Gold said the couple's 15-year-old daughter and 10-year-old son were placed in foster care Monday.

"Our clients did not do anything wrong," Gold said. "There's no reason to remove the children. Whatever happened was not the result of any willful misconduct."

Maria Miller, spokeswoman for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, declined to comment.

"We are in the midst of an ongoing investigation," she said.

Following James' death, state officials suspended the foster care license of Woodward and Karva, who received their license in November 2006, the same month James was placed in their home. The state also suspended the couple's license to operate a family day care in their home.

You can reach Kim Kozlowski at (313) 222-2024 or kkozlowski@detnews.com.

Return to regular web page

The County Press

With love to spare

by JENNIFER J. DECKER STAFF REPORTER

It's a typical image of the last 36 years as Rick Whitis cuddled and rocked one of his two foster babies to sleep.

Meanwhile, three of his daughters played on the "Slip and Slide" out in the yard, his wife Darlene comforted the other foster baby with a bottle, another daughter watched cartoons, and an adopted son dozed off on the back porch.

They're the Whitis family of North Branch and most days, Rick wouldn't have his life any other way. He's used to his family that's seldom quiet and bustles with near constant activity.

Because the two babies are foster children, they aren't allowed to be identified or photographed to protect their identities.

The rest of the family includes: Rick's wife and the children's mother of 37 years, Darlene. Their children are: Jennifer, 32; Katie Whitis-Brady, 25 of Imlay City; Tom, 25, who is adopted; Molly, 20; Whitney, 8; Josie who is adopted and lives in adult foster care. Two other sons are deceased from medical conditions: Jeremy and Brandon.

For the last three decades, Rick has also been Papa to between 60-70 foster children, many with special needs. "Dar's mom was in foster care and we thought we'd try it. We had mostly special needs kids who were medically fragile," Rick said, and added sometimes the children are from households with substance abuse problems. "We always thought of having a large family. We've never been without kids except for the first year (of their marriage)."

"Both mom and dad have a good attitude," said Whitis-Brady. "Being from a big family, they have a routine."

Retired from the Department of Human Services, Rick said he and Darlene never became foster parents with intentions of adopting. Fate changed their minds and their hearts.

"We didn't expect to adopt and Tom was up for adoption and said he never wanted to leave us," Darlene said. "He adopted us."

Daily, the family spends time together, takes care of the babies, and runs the household, errands, and takes kids to doctor's appointments. The family does three or four loads of laundry daily.

"People have said to us several times how our kids help each other," Darlene said. "Mealtime is Jen's department and we usually ask "What's for dinner?' We go to the store every two or three days and go through at least a gallon of milk a day. A mega shopping trip is \$300 and each trip to the grocery store is

usually at least \$100."

"We eat a lot of meals out on the back porch," Rick said as he burped the baby he held.

Christmas time is especially a big event in the Whitis household.

"It's pretty wild here at Christmas,"Tom said. "There's a lot of presents to open."

Rick said one year Whitney got tired of opening Christmas presents and started playing with her new toys.

With today being Father's Day, Rick said if he could have anything for he'd sleep late and lounge around in his hammock, but his kids teased him and said he'd get up early as usual. Darlene said their idea of relaxing is what most others would consider work such as building a shed.

"I have to get him something," Tom said smiling at his father. "He's good."ÔMolly teased that she was really a movie star. She said she wanted to get her dad two pairs of jeans and Hot 'n Now.

Rick said smiling, "Molly's generous and said she'll take us all out for dinner on \$1. I'd like to see how that would happen."

Darlene said the children's father and her husband is an emotional man. "Dad cries over just about anything—Katie singing or Tom will say something nice," Darlene said. "He's a softy."

Rick and Darlene both agreed if the right opportunity came along they'd adopt more kids.

"When losing one it's so hard," Rick said tearing up. "There's always one more who needs a home."

Jennifer J. Decker can be reached at (810) 664-0811, Ext. 8125 or jennifer.decker@lapeergroup.com

Click here to return to story:

http://www.countypress.com/stories/061807/loc_20070618002.shtml





Clinic getting healthy

Tuesday, June 19, 2007

By Christina Hildreth

childreth@citpat.com -- 768-4924

Six months after area foundations rescued St. Luke's Clinic from financial ruin, the free health service at 124 N. Elm St. has its feet back on the ground.

Its doors are still open, it's finances in order, and a \$41,000 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield is on the way. Things are finally looking up -- for now.

In January, Borgess Health Alliance started charging the clinic \$1,500 a month for the 1,200-square-foot facility where St. Luke's operates. Previously, St. Luke's had rented the building for \$50 a month.

Clinic leaders feared they would have to

close until the Weatherwax Foundation and

six area Knights of Columbus councils came

forward with \$9,000 each, covering rent for a year.

Last month, St. Luke's learned it would receive a \$41,000 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan as part of the insurance company's \$1 million grant contest for free clinics. The grant will allow the clinic to purchase updated medical equipment and expand its patient capacity by 10 percent.

The clinic provides free primary care and pharmaceutical services to about 365 patients a month. Some of the grant will also go toward covering rent down the road.

Carolyn Wiener, project leader for Health Policy and Social Mission at Blue Cross Blue Shield, said the company decided to fund St. Luke's in spite of its financial difficulties because her team saw an opportunity to make a difference.

"Unfortunately, many of the free clinics do not have a constant source of funding and must continue to apply for grants and donations to sustain their operations each year," Wiener said.

"In this regard, St. Luke's is not unique."

The clinic is in the clear for the next year or so, but still faces the fundamental problem that it can't cover its rent long-term.

St. Luke's leaders are still looking for a facility to purchase, but so far they have not found a suitable location in their price range.

"What these people want down and the total price of the building is just beyond our reach," said executive director Jim O'Connor. "We just keep looking."

Blue Cross Blue Shield also granted \$22,000 to Dove Health Alliance at 1200 N. West Ave. to expand its dental program.

BOB HERBERT

When Dollars Trump Compassion

You won't see these stories on television, but Marian Wright Edelman and Dr. Irwin Redlener could talk to you all day and all night about children whose lives have been lost or ruined because they didn't have health insurance.

This is not a situation one associates with a so-called advanced country. That you can have sick children wasting away in the United States, the wealthiest nation on the planet, because medical treatment that could relieve their suffering is withheld by men and women with dollar signs instead of compassion in their eyes is beyond unconscionable.

Ms. Edelman is the president of the Children's Defense Fund, and Dr. Redlener is president of the Children's Health Fund.

Both are appalled at the embarrassing fact that nine million American children have no health coverage at all. Among them are children with diabetes, chronic asthma, heart conditions, life-threatening allergies and so on. In many instances they are left untreated until it is too late.

Leaving children uninsured is a form of Russian roulette, Dr. Redlener said.

"All children should be covered," said Ms. Edelman.

Congress and the president could do something about this right now. Of the nine million children without coverage, six million are already eligible for either Medicaid or the popular State Children's Health Insurance Program, or S-chip, which covers children whose parents earn too much to qualify for Medicaid but too

little to afford private health insurance. The bulk of the funding for S-chip comes from the federal government.

S-chip, which had strong bipartisan support when it was established 10 years ago, is currently up for reauthorization in Congress. The program should be expanded as part of a broader effort to cover as many of the six million eligible-but-uninsured kids as possible.

Eligible children remain outside of S-chip and Medicaid for a variety of reasons, including the following: because there is insufficient funding to cover them; because families do not

Playing Russian roulette with children's lives.

realize their children qualify for coverage; because red tape and complicated regulations discourage families from signing up.

A number of S-chip re-authorization proposals are being developed. The best-case scenario would be legislation — costing as much as \$50 billion in additional funding over the next five years — that would cover millions of additional youngsters from poor and working-poor families. This would put the U.S. on the road toward universal coverage for children.

Ten billion dollars a year is considered a pittance when it comes to funding wars and tax cuts for the very wealthy. But it's suddenly a lot of money when the subject is the health of American children.

One of the worst scenarios has been offered by President Bush in his White House budget proposal. That calls for just \$4.8 billion in new funding for S-chip over the next five years. The result, according to the Congressional Budget Office, would be a net loss of coverage for 1.4 million children.

The old expression was "taking candy from a baby." The White House is ready to take away vitally needed medicine.

Negotiations over the reauthorization of S-chip are under way. It will be interesting to see whether the Democrats who crowed so much about their newfound power when they took control of Congress will stand tall for the kids of the poor and working poor, and whether there are enough caring Republicans to resurrect the spirit of bipartisanship from a decade ago.

As the heat gets turned up on this issue, the White House appears to be falling into its old habit of creating its own reality.

The Congressional Budget Office and most researchers have agreed on the six million figure for the number of youngsters who are eligible for government-sponsored health coverage but remain unenrolled — roughly four million for Medicaid and two million for S-chip. This has not been controversial.

Yesterday, the Department of Health and Human Services began circulating a study that tries to make the case that the total number of eligible but uninsured youngsters is a mere 794,000, an absurdly low figure.

If you can wave a magic wand and make five million poor kids disappear, you no longer have to think about caring for them.

Advocates like Dr. Redlener and Ms. Edelman don't have that luxury.

"Kids who grow up with poor access to health care carry a high risk of having underdiagnosed and undertreated chronic illness, both physical and emotional," said Dr. Redlener. "We know what to do. We should fully fund this effort at the \$50 billion level and make coverage mandatory for all children."



Custody battle intensifies

By Jameson Cook Macomb Daily Staff Writer

The custody battle for the children of Tara and Stephen Grant is heating up as Tara's sister recently filed motions to block attempts by Stephen's family to to adopt the 6-year-old girl and 4-year-old boy.

Alicia Standerfer filed motions in court to "strike" Stephen Grant's sister from an adoption request and to force Grant to continue his deposition after he stopped it earlier this month.

Her attorney, Michael Smith, on Monday accused Grant of trying to exert control over his children even if it is not in their best interest.

"He doesn't have control of the criminal case against him, but he does have control over one thing, his kids," Smith said. "What we're trying to do is take control away from him and put it in the court's hands to decide what's in the best interest of his children because he doesn't know what's in the best interest of his children."

Grant is accused of murdering his wife, Tara, and dismembering her body.

Grant's sister, Kelly Utykanski, and attorneys representing her and Grant could not be reached for comment Monday afternoon.

Smith charged that besides Grant's actions in killing his wife, Grant showed other signs of failing to look out for his children in his deposition. Smith would not elaborate.

Smith said he believes Grant and his sister attempted a legal maneuver to gain custody of the children but says it won't work. Utykanski, who is married and lives in Sterling Heights, filed for a "direct placement adoption" in the family division of Macomb County Circuit Court when she should have filed for a "relative placement adoption," Smith said.

The filing indicates to Smith that Grant may have signed away or attempted to sign away his legal parental rights over his children to his sister, he said. However, Smith said he doesn't know whether Grant in fact signed away his rights because of his refusal to complete his deposition. The questioning started June 4 and was scheduled to continue June 6, Smith said, but Grant "abruptly" left and refused to answer questions that second day.

Hearings on the motions were rescheduled from Monday to June 27 because Grant and Utykanski obtained lawyers in the case, Smith said.

The two children are currently placed with Standerfer and her husband, Erik, in their southern Ohio home. Standerfer also is conservator of the children's financial affairs.

Tara's estate won a \$50 million default judgment against Stephen Grant, although it is unlikely they will ever collect any money from Mr. Grant.

In April, Standerfer filed in the family division for a relative placement adoption as well as termination of parental rights against Grant.

The state Department of Human Services, through the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office, also filed for a parental rights termination petition.

Click here to return to story:

http://www.macombdaily.com/stories/061907/loc_custody001.shtml

Jeanne Phillips: Dear Abby

June 19, 2007

Welfare cheats steal help from people who need it

Dear Abby: Thank you, thank you, for publishing the letter from "Ticked Off in Topeka, Kan." concerning welfare fraud, including Section 8 housing fraud. I am an investigator for a housing authority, and our agency is dedicated to maintaining the integrity of the program and protecting the taxpayer dollars entrusted to us. Not a day goes by that I don't hear, "I don't want to get anyone in trouble, but ..."

Please let your readers know that if they call in with a fraud tip, they are not the ones who are getting anyone in trouble. The people who decided to commit the fraud or do the crime got themselves in trouble. The only way we can help the most people with our limited resources is by eliminating fraud and applying the rules and regulations fairly and equitably for everyone.

Quite often it is neighbors, friends and family members who are our eyes and ears. It is important that they let us know when someone is defrauding the system. No one will lose assistance just because of a tip. We investigate every case and, if proven, the tenants are given an opportunity to appeal and to have a hearing. There are too many families on the waiting list and too many people who need help for fraud to go unreported.

Investigator in Oklahoma City



This is a printer friendly version of an article from **The Detroit News** To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

June 19, 2007

Eugene Robinson

Obama talks to America and his dad about fatherlessness



The subject is absent fathers. The implications for black America are dire. The fact is that "there are a lot of men out there who need to stop acting like boys; who need to realize that responsibility does not end at conception; who need to know that what makes you a man is not the ability to have a child but the courage to raise one."

The speaker is Barack Obama, for whom fatherhood is a defining issue, both political and personal. Father's Day has come and gone -- new ties have been put away, new golf clubs tried out, new flat-screen televisions mounted -- but Obama says he will continue to talk about black fatherhood in an attempt to change self-destructive attitudes and

behaviors.

"Too many black men simply cannot afford to raise a family -- and too many have make the sad choice not to," Obama said Friday in what aides touted as a major speech.

You might have heard that Obama is running for president, which makes it impossible to ignore the politics involved. The men-acting-like-boys speech was given in a black church in South Carolina, an early-primary state where half of Democratic voters are African-American. It's not at all rare for a black leader to challenge black Americans on issues of personal responsibility -- that same message, phrased in much stronger terms, is delivered every Sunday from pulpits across the country. The political significance is for the scolding to be given in such a way that white America can't help but overhear what's being said.

In a telephone interview Friday, Obama said he intends to continue and expand this public dialogue. As in the speech, Obama chose his words carefully. "The key to having this conversation constructively," he said, "is to realize that there's really no excuse for not behaving responsibly toward our children."

Is Obama speaking to African-Americans, or is he really trying to reach those whites who believe that most of black America's problems are self-inflicted? I'm paid to be skeptical, but I think something much deeper than political calculation is involved here.

One revelation that comes with spending time with politicians is that they actually have core beliefs. To cite one example, John Edwards may be a multimillionaire but I can't doubt his sincerity when he talks about poverty. I've seen him volunteer in a soup kitchen without first summoning the television cameras. He grew up poor, and the experience has never left him.

Obama grew up without his black father. It doesn't take a psychologist to discern the impact this absence had. He has explained it himself in his books, at considerable length. He talked about it Friday in the fatherhood speech, saying that his mother -- struggling to raise two children as a single parent -- at times needed to rely on food stamps to make it through the month. He also spoke with admiration of his wife Michelle's father, who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis yet supported his family by going to work every day at a water filtration plant, "even when he had to rely on a walker to get him there."

There's nothing startling about Obama's analysis of the macroeconomic forces that contribute to the problem of absent black fathers. Blue-collar jobs that once paid well and offered security, such as his father-in-law's job at the plant, have largely disappeared. "In the last six years, over 300,000 black males have lost jobs in the manufacturing sector," Obama said. The forces of globalization are inexorable. Inner-city schools don't prepare students to compete in today's economy.

While young black fathers love their children and don't set out to be bad parents, Obama told me, they have a dearth of role models and a surfeit of distractions. Their lives are often disorganized, and even if they want a steady job, their prospects are dim.

His prescriptions include job training and tax credits for young noncustodial fathers. But they also include what he called a "crackdown" on child-support enforcement, which he says is intended to collect \$13 billion in outstanding payments.

A crucial issue, Obama said in the interview, is "how we support women who are carrying a disproportionate burden, both financially and emotionally."

Obama gets a good response when he talks about paternal responsibility in front of black audiences. It's an issue that "resonates around the country," he said. "We have to talk in the public square, not only about the obligations of fatherhood but the joys of fatherhood." I can't help but think he's talking not just to America, but to his own late father. Who wasn't there.

Eugene Robinson writes for the Washington Post. His column is distributed by the Washington Post Writers Group, 1150 15th NW, Washington, DC 20071. You can reach him at **eugenerobinson@washpost.com**.

Return to regular web page